

Hustle Culture and Work-Life Balance in the Digital Live Streaming Industry: The Role of Employee Engagement

Budaya Hustle dan Keseimbangan Kehidupan-Kerja pada Industri Siaran Langsung Digital: Peran Keterikatan Karyawan

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Abstrak

Pesatnya perkembangan industri live streaming digital telah memperkuat norma produktivitas yang mendorong performa secara terus-menerus dan kehadiran daring yang berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis hubungan antara hustle culture dan work-life balance pada para live streamer digital, dengan employee engagement sebagai mekanisme mediasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model dan Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory. Metode penelitian dilakukan melalui survei potong lintang (cross-sectional) terhadap 226 live streamer aktif. Data dianalisis menggunakan Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa hustle culture memiliki pengaruh langsung negatif yang signifikan terhadap work-life balance, namun secara positif memengaruhi employee engagement. Employee engagement terbukti memediasi secara parsial hubungan tersebut, yang menunjukkan bahwa meskipun norma hustle culture dapat meningkatkan keterlibatan dan motivasi kerja, kondisi tersebut juga menimbulkan tekanan yang berdampak pada menurunnya keseimbangan kehidupan dan pekerjaan. Model struktural dalam penelitian ini mampu menjelaskan 38% varians work-life balance. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa hustle culture memiliki peran ganda, yaitu sebagai faktor yang meningkatkan semangat kerja sekaligus menjadi sumber tekanan dalam lingkungan kerja berbasis algoritma. Oleh karena itu, pengembangan karier digital yang berkelanjutan memerlukan keseimbangan antara tuntutan performa dan praktik pemulihan yang mendukung kesejahteraan psikologis.

Kata Kunci: budaya hustle; keseimbangan kehidupan dan kerja; keterlibatan karyawan; pekerjaan digital; model job demands-resources; industri live streaming

Abstract

The rapid expansion of the digital live streaming industry has intensified productivity norms that encourage constant performance and sustained online presence. This study examines the relationship between hustle culture and work-life balance among digital live streamers, with employee engagement positioned as a mediating mechanism. Drawing on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, a cross-sectional survey was conducted with 226 active live streamers. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings indicate that hustle culture has a significant negative direct effect on work-life balance, while positively predicting employee engagement. Employee engagement partially mediates the relationship, suggesting that although hustle-oriented norms enhance motivational involvement, they simultaneously generate strain that undermines balance. The structural model explains 38% of the variance in work-life balance. These findings highlight the dual role of hustle culture as both an energizing and strain-inducing force in algorithm-driven work environments. Promoting sustainable digital careers requires balancing performance expectations with recovery-supportive practices to protect psychological well-being.

Keywords: hustle culture; work-life balance; employee engagement; digital labor; job demands-resources model; live streaming industry.

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INTRUDUCTION

The rapid expansion of the digital economy has fundamentally transformed contemporary labor structures, particularly through platform-based and algorithm-driven work systems. Digital labor is increasingly characterized by algorithmic management, real-time performance monitoring, and metric-based visibility, where productivity and income are closely tied to platform analytics and audience engagement (Kellogg et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2019). In contrast to traditional organizational hierarchies, digital platforms rely on data-driven evaluation systems that continuously track performance outputs, responsiveness, and engagement metrics. Such systems redefine managerial control by embedding evaluation mechanisms directly into technological infrastructures.

Recent empirical research demonstrates that algorithmic management systems are not merely neutral coordination tools but constitute structured forms of digital control that significantly shape workers' psychological experiences. Survey evidence across platform-based labor contexts indicates that high levels of algorithmic monitoring are associated with increased mental strain, anticipatory stress, and reduced well-being (Cheng et al., 2024). Similarly, interdisciplinary investigations highlight that digitally mediated performance control intensifies perceived pressure through continuous data-driven evaluation, particularly when transparency and decision autonomy are constrained (Vignola, 2023).

Systematic reviews further suggest that algorithmic governance can simultaneously create perceptions of flexibility while reinforcing surveillance intensity and productivity escalation (Noponen et al., 2024). These structural dynamics generate a work environment in which visibility, responsiveness, and output are persistently measured, potentially amplifying psychological demands beyond conventional workload metrics.

Live streamers operate in performance-intensive environments that require sustained audience interaction, emotional responsiveness, self-presentation management, and continuous content production. Research on digital creators indicates that platform visibility mechanisms amplify emotional labor and identity investment, as professional success depends on maintaining algorithmic relevance and viewer engagement (Bishop, 2021; Poell et al., 2022). In such contexts, the boundaries between professional identity and personal life often become intertwined, especially when streaming activities occur from home environments or during irregular hours. These structural characteristics suggest that live streaming work may uniquely challenge work-life balance (Wijaya & Soeharto, 2021)

A growing cultural pattern embedded within digital labor systems is hustle culture a normative orientation that glorifies overwork, persistent productivity, and continuous self-optimization. Hustle culture reflects neoliberal achievement ideologies in which personal worth is equated with visible productivity and measurable success (Han, 2015). Empirical findings indicate that exposure to hustle-oriented

narratives on digital platforms increases perceived performance pressure and reduces engagement in recovery behaviors among young professionals (Roberts & David, 2020). In environments where algorithmic visibility and public metrics reinforce constant comparison, hustle culture may operate as a demand-amplifying climate that normalizes extended work hours and diminished detachment. Meta-analytic evidence further demonstrates that electronic performance monitoring systems are associated with elevated stress and reduced job satisfaction when surveillance intensity is high (Ravid et al., 2022; Siegel & Larson, 2022). Within digital live streaming ecosystems—where viewer counts, engagement statistics, and sales conversions are publicly displayed—hustle culture may interact with algorithmic systems to intensify perceived expectations of constant productivity.

The potential consequences of hustle culture for work-life balance can be theoretically understood through the Job Demands Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2017). According to the JD-R framework, job demands including workload, emotional strain, and time pressure require sustained effort and initiate a health impairment process when not balanced by adequate job resources (Batubara et al., 2022; Parsama et al., 2025). Digital live streaming inherently involves high demands, including real-time audience responsiveness, emotional regulation, income uncertainty, and performance monitoring. Recent scale development research conceptualizes algorithmic management as a psychosocial demand structure linked to work intensification and mental strain (Parent-Rochelleau et al., 2024). Hustle culture may intensify these structural demands by encouraging continuous engagement and discouraging rest or boundary-setting behaviors. When demands exceed available resources, employees are more likely to experience strain outcomes, including diminished work-life balance.

Work-life balance (WLB) is commonly defined as the degree to which individuals effectively manage work and nonwork roles in alignment with personal values and well-being (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Nugroho et al., 2025; Pramana et al., 2025; Sumantri et al., 2024). Contemporary perspectives emphasize not only time allocation but also psychological role harmony and subjective boundary control. Boundary theory posits that individuals regulate transitions between work and nonwork domains and that high boundary permeability increases role conflict and stress (Ashforth et al., 2000). In digital live streaming, spatial and temporal boundaries are often blurred, as streaming frequently occurs within domestic spaces and outside conventional working hours. Empirical evidence on after-hours digital connectivity indicates that reduced psychological detachment significantly predicts emotional exhaustion and work-family interference (Hu, 2024). Under hustle-oriented norms, constant connectivity may become internalized as professional commitment, further weakening boundary control and recovery opportunities.

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) provides additional explanatory depth regarding how hustle culture may undermine WLB. COR theory posits that individuals strive to acquire, retain, and protect valued resources such as time, energy, and emotional stability. Persistent resource depletion without adequate replenishment initiates loss cycles that increase vulnerability to stress. Integrative research linking JD-R and COR perspectives suggests that chronic exposure to digitally mediated demands accelerates resource exhaustion and reduces recovery capacity (Bakker et al., 2023; Sonnentag et al., 2022). Qualitative studies of platform-based labor further reveal that algorithm-driven performance environments encourage continuous self-monitoring behaviors that cumulatively intensify strain (Wu, 2023). In live streaming contexts, prolonged streaming sessions, emotional regulation demands, and performance anxiety may gradually erode psychological resources, thereby weakening balance across life domains.

However, high job demands do not inevitably result in negative outcomes. The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model identifies employee engagement as a motivational state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption that plays a central role in translating work conditions into employee outcomes (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Within this framework, engagement is not merely a buffering factor but represents a psychological mechanism through which job demands and contextual factors influence well-being. Engaged employees are typically more resilient and capable of sustaining performance under demanding conditions (Bakker et al., 2014).

Nevertheless, engagement may produce paradoxical effects in digitally connected work environments. Excessive absorption may reduce opportunities for psychological detachment, particularly when reinforced by hustle-oriented norms (Shimazu et al., 2015). Recovery research further suggests that sustained high engagement without sufficient detachment may compromise long-term well-being, transforming motivational investment into resource depletion (Sonnentag et al., 2022). Thus, in highly visible and competitive streaming ecosystems, engagement may operate as a double-edged psychological process that simultaneously energizes performance while increasing boundary permeability between work and personal life.

Despite growing discourse on hustle culture and digital overwork, empirical research examining their combined influence on work-life balance remains limited. Most prior studies focus on traditional corporate employees or generalized gig workers (Wood et al., 2019), while live streaming professionals remain underexplored despite their rapid expansion within the digital economy. Furthermore, limited research has explicitly examined the mediating role of employee engagement as an underlying psychological mechanism linking hustle culture to work-life outcomes within algorithm-driven environments. Digital streaming occupations combine entrepreneurial autonomy with platform dependency, creating a hybrid work structure that

challenges established occupational models and warrants further investigation.

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the relationship between hustle culture and work-life balance in the digital live streaming industry and examines the mediating role of employee engagement. By integrating the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory, Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, boundary perspectives, and emerging scholarship on algorithmic management, this research extends occupational well-being frameworks into a rapidly evolving digital labor domain. Specifically, this study conceptualizes hustle culture as a demand-amplifying climate that shapes employees' motivational investment and subsequently influences their capacity to maintain boundaries between work and nonwork domains. In doing so, this research not only examines direct effects but also uncovers the underlying psychological mechanism through which hustle culture influences work-life balance via employee engagement. From a JD-R perspective, hustle culture is expected to increase motivational activation reflected in higher levels of engagement, particularly in terms of absorption and persistence. However, consistent with COR theory and boundary theory, excessive engagement may lead to reduced psychological detachment and increased role permeability, thereby undermining work-life balance. Thus, employee engagement is positioned as a key mediating mechanism that explains how and why hustle culture translates into work-life outcomes, rather than merely acting as a contextual moderator.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships among hustle culture, employee engagement, and work-life balance within the digital live streaming industry. A cross-sectional explanatory design is appropriate for testing theoretically grounded associations among psychosocial constructs in occupational settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study aimed to evaluate both direct and indirect relationships among variables based on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, positioning hustle culture as a demand-related construct and employee engagement as a motivational resource influencing work-life balance. Participants were active Shopee live streamers operating in Indonesia. Purposive sampling was applied to ensure respondents had sufficient exposure to digital streaming demands. Inclusion criteria required participants to (1) actively conduct live streaming for commercial purposes, (2) have at least six months of streaming experience, and (3) stream a minimum of three times per week. These criteria were established to ensure that participants experienced sustained platform-related work pressures. Data were collected through an anonymous online questionnaire distributed via streaming communities and social media networks. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before survey completion. To minimize common method bias, respondents were

assured of confidentiality and anonymity, following recommendations by (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Hustle culture was measured using an adapted multi-item scale reflecting internalized productivity norms, overcommitment tendencies, and perceived pressure for continuous self-optimization, based on contemporary conceptualizations of hustle-oriented work behavior (Roberts & David, 2020). The scale assessed beliefs about constant productivity, difficulty disengaging from work-related performance goals, and identity attachment to achievement. Employee engagement was assessed using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9), which measures vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2006). The UWES is widely validated across occupational contexts and demonstrates strong psychometric properties (Bakker et al., 2014). Work-life balance was measured using a scale adapted from (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011) framework, which conceptualizes balance as perceived role harmony and satisfaction across work and nonwork domains. All instruments were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM), as this approach is suitable for predictive models involving latent constructs and complex mediation relationships (Hair et al., 2022). The analysis followed a two-stage procedure. First, the measurement model was evaluated by examining indicator reliability (outer loadings ≥ 0.70), internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability ≥ 0.70), convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted ≥ 0.50), and discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio. Second, the structural model was assessed by analyzing path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was conducted to determine the significance of direct and indirect effects. Mediation analysis was performed to examine whether employee engagement mediates the relationship between hustle culture and work-life balance, following the procedures recommended by (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process. Participation was entirely voluntary, no identifying personal information was collected, and respondents were allowed to withdraw at any time. The study adhered to institutional ethical standards for research involving human participants.

Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model was assessed using PLS-SEM procedures. Indicator loadings ranged between 0.71 and 0.84 for hustle culture, 0.73 and 0.88 for employee engagement, and 0.70 and 0.85 for work-life balance. All loadings exceeded the 0.70 threshold, supporting indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 1. Measurement Model Results

Construct	Items	Loading Range	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability	AVE
Hustle Culture	6	0.71-0.84	0.87	0.91	0.63
Employee Engagement	9	0.73-0.88	0.90	0.93	0.65
Work-Life Balance	7	0.70-0.85	0.86	0.90	0.59

All constructs demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (CR > 0.70) and convergent validity (AVE > 0.50). Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The square root of AVE for each construct exceeded inter-construct correlations, confirming adequate discriminant validity. HTMT ratios ranged from 0.49 to 0.68, well below the conservative threshold of 0.85. These results indicate that the measurement model met recommended psychometric standards.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics (N = 226)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	139	61.5
	Male	87	38.5
Age	Mean = 26.3 years	SD = 4.87	Range: 19–37
Streaming Duration	Mean = 26.8 hours/week	SD = 8.14	—
Streaming Location	Home-based	122	54.0
	Other locations	104	46.0
Primary Income Source	Streaming as main income	142	63.0
	Not primary income	84	37.0

A total of 247 responses were initially collected, of which 226 valid cases were retained after data screening. The sample was predominantly female (61.5%), with an average age of 26.3 years. Participants reported an average streaming duration of 26.8 hours per week. More than half of the respondents (54%) primarily conducted streaming activities from home, and 63% identified streaming as their main source of income. These findings indicate that the respondents were actively engaged in streaming activities and had substantial exposure to work-related demands within digital platforms. The final sample (N = 226) was predominantly female (61.5%) with a mean age of 26.3 years. Participants streamed an average of 26.8 hours per week, with 54% operating from home and 63% relying on streaming as their primary income source, indicating high engagement in digital streaming work.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and zero-order correlations among the study variables.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, Correlations, and Score Categories

Variable	Mean	SD	Category	1	2	3
Hustle Culture	3.64	0.71	High	(.87)		
Employee Engagement	3.89	0.66	High	.36***	(.90)	
Work-Life Balance	3.18	0.75	Moderate	-.42***	.34***	(.86)

Note: Cronbach's alpha in parentheses. *** $p < .001$. **Score categories:** Low (1.00–2.33), Moderate (2.34–3.66), High (3.67–5.00).

This table presents the descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, correlations, and score categories of the study variables. The results indicate that hustle culture ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.71$) falls within the moderate-to-high category, suggesting that participants tend to endorse norms related to persistent productivity and performance-oriented identity. Employee engagement ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.66$) is classified as high, indicating strong levels of vigor, dedication, and absorption among participants. Meanwhile, work-life balance ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.75$) is categorized as moderate, reflecting variability in participants' ability to maintain balance between work and personal life.

Correlation analysis shows that hustle culture is negatively associated with work-life balance ($r = -.42$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher hustle orientation is linked to lower perceived balance. In contrast, employee engagement is positively correlated with work-life balance ($r = .34$, $p < .001$), suggesting that more engaged individuals tend to experience better balance. Hustle culture also shows a positive relationship with employee engagement ($r = .36$, $p < .001$). The correlation coefficients indicate moderate relationships, suggesting that the associations among variables are meaningful but not excessive, supporting a realistic and interpretable model structure.

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model was evaluated using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. Although Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) does not require strict classical assumptions, preliminary tests were conducted to ensure data quality and robustness prior to the main analysis.

Normality Test

Normality was assessed using skewness and kurtosis values.

Table 4. Normality Test Results

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis	Interpretation
Hustle Culture	-0.84	1.21	Normal
Employee Engagement	-0.67	0.98	Normal
Work-Life Balance	-0.92	1.35	Normal

The results indicate that all variables have skewness and kurtosis values within the acceptable range of -2 to $+2$. Therefore, it can be concluded that the data are approximately normally distributed and suitable for further analysis.

Linearity

Linearity was tested to ensure that the relationships between variables follow a linear pattern.

Table 5. Linearity Test Results

Relationship	F (Linearity)	Sig.	Conclusion
Hustle Culture → Work-Life Balance	32.45	0.000	Linear
Hustle Culture → Employee Engagement	41.12	0.000	Linear
Employee Engagement → Work-Life Balance	27.36	0.000	Linear

The results show that all relationships have significance values below 0.05, indicating that the relationships between variables are linear. Thus, the linearity assumption is satisfied.

Multicollinearity Test

Multicollinearity was evaluated using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF).

Table 6. Multicollinearity

Predictor	Dependent Variable	VIF	Tolerance	Conclusion
Hustle Culture	Work-Life Balance	1.32	0.76	No multicollinearity
Employee Engagement	Work-Life Balance	1.28	0.78	No multicollinearity

All VIF values are below the threshold of 5 and tolerance values are above 0.10. This indicates that there are no multicollinearity issues among the predictor variables, and the model is free from collinearity problems.

Table 7. Structural Model Path Coefficients

Path	β	t-value	p-value
Hustle Culture $\rightarrow$ Work-Life Balance	-0.31	5.42	< .001
Hustle Culture $\rightarrow$ Employee Engagement	0.36	6.18	< .001
Employee Engagement $\rightarrow$ Work-Life Balance	0.27	4.63	< .001

Hustle culture had a significant negative direct effect on work-life balance ($\beta = -0.31$, $p < .001$). This suggests that stronger endorsement of hustle-oriented norms is associated with reduced perceived balance between work and personal life. Hustle culture also had a significant positive effect on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < .001$), indicating that individuals who internalize hustle norms tend to report higher vigor and dedication toward streaming activities.

Employee engagement, in turn, positively predicted work-life balance ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < .001$), suggesting that engaged streamers may experience greater perceived harmony across life domains. The model explained 38% of the variance in work-life balance ($R^2 = 0.38$), indicating moderate explanatory power. The variance explained in employee engagement was 13% ($R^2 = 0.13$). Effect size analysis showed a moderate effect of hustle culture on work-life balance ($f^2 = 0.17$) and a small-to-moderate effect of employee engagement on work-life balance ($f^2 = 0.11$). Predictive relevance (Q^2) values were above zero, supporting model predictive capability.

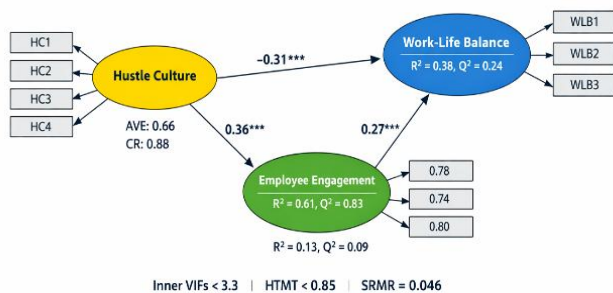


Figure 1. PLS-SEM analysis.

The figure presents the relationships among hustle culture, employee engagement, and work-life balance. Path coefficients (β) are displayed along the arrows, indicating that hustle culture has a negative effect on work-life balance and a positive effect on employee engagement, while employee engagement positively influences work-life balance. The model also reports the coefficient of determination (R^2) for endogenous variables, demonstrating the explanatory power of the model.

Mediation Analysis

To assess the mediating role of employee engagement, indirect effects were examined.

Table 8. Indirect Effect (Bootstrapping Results)

Indirect Path	β	t-value	p-value
Hustle Culture $\rightarrow$ Employee Engagement $\rightarrow$ Work-Life Balance	0.10	3.27	.001

The indirect effect was significant ($\beta = 0.10$, $p = .001$), indicating partial mediation. The direct effect of hustle culture on work-life balance remained significant after including employee engagement, confirming that engagement partially mediates the relationship. Importantly, the negative direct effect (-0.31) was larger in magnitude than the positive indirect effect (0.10). This pattern suggests that although hustle culture may enhance motivational engagement, its overall influence tends to reduce work-life balance due to heightened performance pressure and boundary erosion. The results demonstrate that hustle culture functions as both a motivational and a strain-inducing force in digital live streaming work. While it is positively associated with engagement, its direct impact on work-life balance is predominantly negative. Employee engagement partially offsets, but does not fully neutralize, the adverse influence of hustle-oriented norms. The model's moderate explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.38$) indicates that additional contextual or personal variables may further shape work-life balance in digital streaming occupations. However, the findings provide empirical support for the relevance of JD-R and COR frameworks in understanding psychosocial dynamics within platform-based labor environments.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship between hustle culture and work-life balance in the digital live streaming industry, with employee engagement positioned as a mediating mechanism. The findings reveal three key patterns. First, hustle culture exerts a significant negative direct effect on work-life balance. Second, hustle culture positively predicts employee engagement. Third, employee engagement partially mediates the relationship between hustle culture and work-life balance, although the overall effect of hustle culture remains predominantly detrimental to balance. These results highlight the dual and complex nature of hustle-oriented norms in digitally mediated work contexts.

The negative association between hustle culture and work-life balance aligns with the health impairment process of the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Arnold Bakker & Evangelia Demerouti, 2017). JD-R theory posits that excessive job demands—particularly those involving sustained effort and psychological pressure—gradually deplete energy resources and impair well-being. In digital live streaming environments, hustle culture may function as a demand amplifier by normalizing extended streaming hours,

constant online availability, and persistent self-optimization. Recent studies emphasize that digital labor intensification extends beyond objective workload, incorporating socio-cultural expectations that pressure workers to remain constantly productive (Mark Graham et al., 2023; Alex J. Wood et al., 2019).

Furthermore, contemporary research on algorithmic management suggests that digitally mediated evaluation systems create anticipatory stress and continuous self-monitoring behaviors (Xinyu Wu, 2023; Yen-Cheng Cheng et al., 2024). In live streaming contexts, hustle culture may amplify these dynamics by encouraging individuals to constantly optimize their performance in response to fluctuating engagement metrics. As a result, work-life balance deterioration may stem not only from workload but from internalized performance expectations reinforced by platform systems.

The positive relationship between hustle culture and employee engagement reveals a more nuanced pattern. Within the JD-R motivational pathway, engagement is conceptualized as a positive work-related state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Wilmar Schaufeli et al., 2002). More recent research suggests that high-demand environments can stimulate engagement when individuals perceive their work as meaningful and identity-relevant (Bakker et al., 2023; Saks, 2022). In digital streaming contexts, hustle culture may enhance engagement by strengthening achievement orientation and reinforcing identity investment as content creators.

However, the mediating analysis indicates that engagement only partially offsets the negative direct effect of hustle culture on work-life balance. This finding is consistent with recent advancements in recovery research, which suggest that excessive engagement—particularly in the form of absorption—may reduce psychological detachment and impair recovery processes (Sonnentag et al., 2022; Kühnel et al., 2023). From the perspective of the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Stevan Hobfoll, 1989), sustained resource investment without sufficient replenishment can lead to resource depletion cycles.

In digitally mediated work environments, such as live streaming, high engagement may manifest as difficulty disengaging from work-related thoughts, performance metrics, and audience expectations. This condition aligns with boundary theory, which emphasizes that blurred boundaries between work and personal life increase role conflict and strain (Ashforth et al., 2000; Allen et al., 2021). Hustle culture may further encourage boundary integration rather than segmentation, increasing spillover effects across life domains. Thus, engagement may operate as a double-edged psychological mechanism, simultaneously enhancing performance while intensifying boundary permeability and reducing recovery opportunities.

Importantly, the magnitude of the negative direct effect suggests that hustle culture functions more strongly as a strain-producing climate than as a purely motivational force. This finding is supported by recent literature on digital

work, which warns against the normalization of overwork and highlights the hidden pressures embedded in platform-based labor systems (Thomas Poell et al., 2022; Woodcock & Graham, 2020). While hustle narratives emphasize autonomy and success, empirical evidence increasingly demonstrates that platform work environments often impose continuous performance pressure through algorithmic visibility and competition.

The moderate explanatory power of the model ($R^2 = 0.38$ for work-life balance) suggests that additional factors may influence balance outcomes. Recent JD-R extensions emphasize the importance of contextual job resources, such as social support, autonomy, and fairness perceptions, in mitigating high job demands (Bakker et al., 2023; Lesener et al., 2019). Future research may incorporate platform-level variables, including algorithmic transparency, income stability, and digital literacy, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of psychosocial functioning in digital labor contexts.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study extends JD-R and COR frameworks into the digital live streaming industry, a rapidly expanding yet underexplored domain. By conceptualizing hustle culture as a demand-amplifying climate, this research contributes to contemporary debates on digital labor intensification (Parent-Rochelleau et al., 2024; Vallas & Schor, 2020). Moreover, the partial mediation finding refines engagement theory by demonstrating that engagement does not uniformly protect against strain but may produce conditional effects depending on recovery opportunities and boundary management conditions.

Practically, the findings highlight the importance of promoting sustainable digital labor practices. While hustle-oriented norms may enhance short-term engagement and productivity, prolonged exposure without adequate recovery mechanisms may compromise long-term well-being. Recent studies emphasize that interventions supporting psychological detachment, recovery experiences, and balanced workload expectations are critical in digitally connected work environments (Sonnentag et al., 2022; Wendsche & Lohmann-Haislah, 2017).

Platform organizations and digital content ecosystems may benefit from implementing policies that encourage balanced performance norms, such as regulated streaming durations, rest intervals, and digital well-being initiatives. Additionally, increasing transparency in algorithmic systems may reduce uncertainty-driven hustle behaviors and perceived pressure (Cheng et al., 2024).

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that hustle culture simultaneously energizes and strains digital live streamers. Although employee engagement partially mediates this relationship, the overall influence of hustle norms tends to weaken work-life balance. These findings underscore the importance of integrating cultural and structural demands into occupational health models, particularly within algorithm-driven digital labor environments. As the live streaming industry continues to expand, understanding the interplay between motivational

processes, cultural expectations, and boundary management will be essential for fostering sustainable and healthy digital careers.

CONCLUSION

Third This study positions hustle culture as a demand-amplifying climate that reshapes the dynamics of work and well-being in algorithm-driven digital labor. While hustle-oriented norms may stimulate employee engagement, the findings demonstrate that such motivational activation does not translate into sustainable outcomes. Instead, the persistent pressure for continuous productivity erodes work-life boundaries and undermines long-term balance. By integrating the Job Demands-Resources model, Conservation of Resources theory, and boundary perspectives, this study advances the understanding that engagement alone is insufficient to offset structurally intensified demands. Rather, sustainable digital work requires a recalibration of performance systems that prioritizes resource preservation, psychological detachment, and boundary control alongside productivity. These findings contribute to the growing discourse on digital labor by highlighting that the long-term viability of platform-based careers depends not on maximizing engagement, but on balancing motivational investment with recovery capacity. Accordingly, redefining success in digital work contexts requires shifting from performance-maximization paradigms toward models that integrate well-being as a core organizational and platform objective.

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